

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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A NARROW ESCAPE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "DENIS DONOE," "NO ALTERNATIVE,"
&c. &c.

CHAPTER XVI. "THE LITTLE SPEC."

Mrs. Grange's fluency has, if appearances are to be relied upon, had its due effect on Frank Forest. He has sought and soothed his May. He has even gone further, out of his extreme desire to keep things smooth. He has taught her to think that she has been the one who has halted, and hesitated, and vacillated. "As Frank says," May tells her sister, "it's not becoming for a man to press a girl too hard; I daresay I am very trying to him," May goes on simply. "I expect more, you know, than any man ever rendered up to any woman before."

Her sister looks at May sharply.

"If you're satisfied, your family have no right to complain" she says, presently. "Thank goodness, it's you who are going to marry him and not me. I suppose something has been said about the wedding day? Every one is asking me, and it's awkward to have to say that Mr. Forest hasn't quite made up his mind, as to whether he will take you at all or not."

"I wish you wouldn't be so bitter," poor May sobs; "it's that that makes me so disagreeable to Frank very often; and he has said something about the wedding-day; he has said a great deal about it. He wants to be married very quietly, and he doesn't mind how soon it is."

"That last clause is a great condescension on his part, and very flattering to you," Mrs. Grange replies. "My dear May, as I said just now, if you're satisfied, your family have no right to complain; but I must say that he is showing very

painly that he doesn't want to marry you at all."

This conversation takes place about a week after the last one that has been recorded between May and Frank; and in the interim, May, not having been driven on at the point of that sword, her sister's tongue, has been rather placidly pleasant to Frank than otherwise. He is purchasing present peace at the price of surrendering up his presence and his reasoning faculties to Miss Constable, but he feels that the yoke is a heavy one, and knows that he will find it heavier still, when it is fastened upon him by legal bonds.

He has brought himself to write one letter to Kate, and Kate receives it the morning after Mr. Angerstein's death. It is as follows:—

"My own darling—for that you will always be, though I dare not ask you to be my wife—I am not worthy of another thought of yours; still, for heaven's sake, don't give up thinking of me kindly. I am to be married to May in a few weeks, and I mean manfully to try and make her a good husband; but every possibility of happiness will vanish from my life from the day that makes her my wife. I can't pen the canting humbug that some men would pen on such an occasion, and that is, pray that you may bless some worthier man. I only know that if you ever do so I shall curse the 'worthier man.' But I think I know you, Kate. I think, faulty as I have been, that you will never be false to the love you so richly and generously endowed me with. May I see you once more? Yours, F. F."

He means every word of this effusion most thoroughly, and he is so touched by the sensation of the emotions the writing of it has caused him, that he is blind to all

the cruelty and meanness contained in every sentence of it. His passion for Kate revives so strongly while he is writing to her, that he really commands himself for not penning even warmer words. He almost complimented himself on the unselfishness with which he refrains from urging her to give him a definite promise, that she will guard her heart against any other man.

His conscience clears itself considerably when he sees May for the first time after he has posted this letter. It seems to him that he has done her such an act of justice, that his sense of right doing almost obliterates from his memory the thought of the pain that must be Kate's portion, when she receives that letter. In an easy and off-hand way he tells May what he has done.

"By the way," he says, "I have just been writing to my cousin Kate, to tell her that our little affair is settled, and that she had better begin to think of the present."

"Why couldn't your sisters have written?" May questions quickly; "and I am sure I don't want a present from her; I only care to take presents from people I love and trust."

"You must love and trust a good round number," Frank says; "you told me yesterday that you had put down the names of four hundred people from whom you expected gifts on the happy occasion."

"I am happy to say that I don't know anyone like Miss Mervyn," May says with pointed emphasis. "No, Frank, I am not jealous; I have not such a low opinion of myself as to be jealous of a girl whom I never heard anyone else admire but yourself; but when people outrage propriety, I neither like nor trust them."

"How has she outraged propriety?" Frank asks in a passion.

"Ask yourself," May says, tersely.

"I do, and answer solemnly that she has never done so."

"Then I'll tell you something that will make even you change that opinion," May says, beginning to cry a little, for she is half frightened at her own audacity. "She ran away with a married man once; there!"

"Whoever told you so, lies."

"It's very easy to say that, Frank, but not at all easy to prove it. I was dancing with a friend of Clement Graham's last night, and we talked about poor Clement, and he said he would tell me a romance in real life, that was the commencement of poor Clement's ruin. Shall I tell it to you?"

"Yes," Frank says, and his betrothed proceeds to give a highly coloured and garbled version of the old story that began in Torquay. As he listens to it his face grows pale, and his heart beats, and his manner such that poor misguided May cannot any longer doubt as to whether he loves his cousin or not.

"It was vengeance against Clement Graham that made him pick the quarrel, and get Clement turned out of the service. Clement had balked him, and exposed him, and carried away the girl from him, and he wanted revenge. So much for your cousin."

"Did the gabbling idiot tell you the name of the man?" he asks.

"No, he'd either forgotten it or never heard it; but there was no doubt about the girl being your Kate Mervyn; he was quite surprised to hear that she was in society; people down in Torquay cut her directly—naturally you know."

He makes an effort to collect his scattered thoughts, and remembers that Kate has expressed sympathy for Clement Graham. Thoughts of Clement Graham suggest thoughts of Bellairs, and with a moan of bitter dread and shame he remembers that she has cautioned him against Bellairs, as a married man bent on concealing the fact of his marriage.

"It's a lie from beginning to end," he says, trying to impress May with an idea of his disbelief in it; "all the same, kill and bury it as carefully as if it were a truth."

"You won't wish me to associate with Miss Mervyn until it is cleared up, Frank? A girl against whom such a charge is made can hardly expect to come back and be received as if nothing had happened."

Kate to be spoken about in this way. Kate, the freest, dearest, frankest woman who had ever crossed his path; Kate, in whose veins his own blood ran, who was dear to him as a cousin and member of his own family, as well as dear to him as the passion of his life! It is all too humiliating, too sad a shame for a man to bear up against.

"If it turns out to be true," he says, surrendering his first position of utter disbelief, "I shall give up the game, and get out of the country—"

"I'm not going to live abroad, because your cousin has disgraced herself," May says, hardly. In justification of her hardness, it must be told that Frank's agony is agonizing to her. He is making

it so very plain to her, that Kate is precious to him—that every blow aimed at her reputation strikes and hurts him.

“Use softer words, May,” he says, brokenly, “and be true to me, by keeping this wretched rumour to yourself; it may be that we shall have to part; for—you speak of what you will do if ‘my cousin has disgraced herself;’ now understand once and for ever, that whatever may be the truth of it, I stand by her.”

“I believe you’d rejoice in anything if it parted us, and left you free for her,” May sobs, and Frank feels that it is indeed a hopeless task to endeavour to get May to understand him after this.

“I’ll clear it up,” he tells himself, “I’ll go down to my poor darling, and if she tells me it’s true, I’ll hunt down the fellow who wronged her, and I’ll horsewhip any other fellow who ever speaks about it.”

He does not tell May of his intention of going down into Somersetshire. Miss Constable is much occupied in her interesting preparations, in superintending the composition of the various costumes, by means of which she intends to vindicate English taste on the continent, during the honeymoon. Frank has been offered his freedom for three or four days, and he means to avail himself of it.

He has not attempted to come to a definite determination as to what he shall do, if the “wretched rumour” has the slightest foundation. To “love Kate through it all,” is his expressed resolve to himself, to revile her for having ever cared for another fellow sufficiently to compromise herself, is his unexpressed one. Happily for everyone concerned, poor Kate is, as we know, innocent of everything, save having made the mistake of believing Clement Graham’s word, rather than that of Captain Bellairs.

“Kate’s at Lymouth, isn’t she?” Frank asks of his sister Gertrude this night, when they all meet in the drawing-room, rather late, and each one fully occupied with his or her own interests.

“At Lymouth!” Gertrude ejaculates.

“Why it’s to Lymouth Captain Bellairs is gone, isn’t it?” Mrs. Forest questions, rearing herself up on the sofa.

“The devil it is!” Frank puts in angrily, for the pieces of the puzzle are beginning to adjust themselves too nicely.

“Harry Bellairs didn’t know that Kate

was there, mamma, if you mean that,” Gertrude says, in a manner that is as dignified, as the knowledge that she is shaking with mingled mortification and jealousy will allow her to make it.

“Even if he had known it, Kate wouldn’t have wanted him there; he’s not the sort of fellow Kate cares to have hanging about her, she let me see that.”

“Kate is so clever, she lets every one see exactly what she wants to be seen,” Gertrude says; “please don’t look as if you had just found out a conundrum, Marian.”

“You’re a riddle that anyone who runs may read,” the younger sister laughs out; “but why this sudden family feeling as to Kate’s whereabouts? do you want to see our revered uncle again, Frank?”

“I want to hear from herself whether or not there is any foundation for an infernal lie that is going about—”

“About Kate herself?” Gertrude asks.

“About Kate herself,” her brother replies, and Gertrude flushes scarlet at the recollection of the tale which has been told to her by Captain Bellairs.

“If I were in your place I wouldn’t fish in troubled waters,” Gertrude says, presently; “poor Kate, who has led such a quiet, peaceful life! What could be more insulting and offensive to her than to go and tell her of any idle report that has been raised about her in town on account of her beauty and her charm; that’s all it is, depend upon it, Frank. Now hasn’t May been teasing you? May would rejoice in your offending Kate; it would cut you off from your cousin for ever.”

“There is something in that,” Frank says, and he not only says it but he feels it. Nevertheless, the excuse to go down and set straight a family crookedness is too good a one to be neglected. Accordingly he gets up early the next morning, and is down at Lymouth by six o’clock in the evening.

He hears of Mr. Angerstein’s death, and of the despair of Mr. Angerstein’s widow, within ten minutes of his arrival. The despair (though neither he nor anyone else knows it), is consequent on the dereliction of duty of which in her own heart she knows herself to have been guilty. He also hears that the young lady “who is staying with Mrs. Angerstein has walked up to Watersmeet this evening,” and up to Watersmeet he follows her presently, with his love and pride in arms, and his

heart the battle-ground for a bitter combat between inclination and duty.

Beautiful Watersmeet has witnessed the development and the death of many a love, and the despondency and despair of many a lover. But probably it has never witnessed anything more embarrassing than the meeting which takes place this evening. Frank walking up eagerly, full of the hope of meeting her there alone, comes suddenly upon a quiet pair whom for a minute or two he does not recognise. The lady is leaning forward, her eyes shrouded from the light of the dying day by her hand. The man is lounging back, trying to keep his cigar alight at the same time as he is murmuring out the words of a song, that seem to sing themselves as he utters them. Altogether it is a perfect picture of love in idleness.

These are the words he is saying—these are the words Frank Forest finds himself compelled to listen to.

Hush! heath-fed wind, let song-birds sweet,
Hid high in sunny beams,
To the awakened soul repeat
The music of her dreams.
When liquid sheets of moonshine drowned
The darkness of the dell,
And made a mystic light around
The chanting Philomel.
And thou whose lips soft language heard,
The hearts fleet throbs among,
Revealed without one uttered word,
The secret of all song.
Oh! silent lips that said so much,
So sweetly and so plain,
Why said you not I ne'er should touch
Your loveliness again?
I go—farewell dear love—but now
The wanderer is removed,
Forget not that he loved as thou
Wert worthy to be loved.

"They're very pretty," Kate Mervyn's voice says clearly, "but I don't quite like your making a man rebuke a girl for not being colder. Where is the woman who could care for a man after he threw her back upon herself in that way?"

"The woman is here if she loved the man before he said it," Captain Bellairs says; "Kate, the meaning of that song is for you; why have you given me the joy of this evening, why have you shown me that I am unforgiven, and, therefore, un-forgotten, still, if you can't go any further—if you can't—"

"Oh! Frank, Frank," she cries out, rising and stretching her hands out towards him as he breaks through the boughs that are bending down and over-shading the bend of the river by lovely Watersmeet.

A RUN THROUGH LORRAINE AND ALSACE.

MORE than three years had elapsed since the close of the fatal war which resulted in the cession of two of the fairest of the French provinces, Alsace and Lorraine, to Germany, when business led my steps in that direction. As the attention and interest of all intelligent Europe had been concentrated there for so long, I was intensely curious, not only to traverse the country from end to end, but also, and above all, to associate myself as much as possible with the inhabitants of the provinces, and so make myself acquainted with their present spirit and frame of mind towards their new masters.

I had been accustomed all my life to the "tall talk" of the Parisians, and, since the war, had heard of nothing but the unalienability of the Alsatian heart from France, the utter impossibility that any time or circumstances would ever reconcile it to Germany. I was therefore not a little anxious to see with my own eyes whether the three years of annexation already elapsed had done anything to reconcile the hearts of the Lorrains and Alsatians to their conquerors. Were they still as bitter and antagonistic? Had the emigration been really as extensive as was declared, and had not commercial and family interests begun to prevail as one might reasonably expect against their ruinous French patriotism?

Well, no. Entirely German in language, in customs, and modes of life; German also in character, the Alsatians still seem more French in heart than any other part of the now Republic.

Starting by railroad from Luxembourg, the Prussian element has already become universal. The Prussian badge upon the red caps and uniforms of the officials, has replaced the lion rampant of Belgium, and their superior organisation makes itself recognised at once by the absence of all the jostling, and crowding, and counter currents one has been used to in Belgium.

My neighbour, a Messin, was soon in conversation on the two inevitable topics, French politics and the annexation. Any one accustomed to French society knows how easily each political partisan annihilates his adversary. As a Republican, therefore, my companion naturally bore down, at one fell swoop, upon Legitimists, Imperialists, and above all the hybrid government called the party of order, now

so strangely uppermost. Then came the cry from his deepest heart, "But whatever our divisions, all parties are one upon the subject of our provinces—they can never remain as they are now; war is inevitable, and the one indisputable necessity with every party is to prepare our army as quickly as possible for the fierce struggle."

No wonder he could not forget his longings for one instant. There, in sight of that world-renowned Metz—there, on every side as we travel through that beautiful plain of Lorraine—is the German official; while all the railway stock, every truck, every wagon, every carriage, and even every window blind, is marked with those words, "Elsass—Lothringen," so terribly offensive to a Frenchman's heart!

A French priest and two old French ladies were my other companions, and we were joined later by a well-to-do woman, who at once informed us that she was in business at Sarguemines, and proceeded to expatiate upon the stagnation of business since the war, "not that the Prussians vex us, or are not *bien gentil*," she observed, "only no one in the provinces has any confidence. Old firms that have made money enough, retire; others that were doing a good business, have left (I was afterwards told of five which had settled with all their workmen at Elboeuf), and others that were beginning, have not ventured to continue. Then we have been drained of money," she went on to say, "by requisitions first, and increased taxation since, so that *le commerce est bien malheureux*. The rich have often been able to make good their claims, and obtain some kind of restitution, but we smaller folks, on whom the war fell heaviest, have had no chance of indemnity, and have almost always lost all that was taken from us by force. But we must be patient, so many have lost so much more by the war," she added, pointing out different localities on our road, and relating of each its tale of anguish, winding up with the account of a monument she had just been to see at Rheims, erected in honour of Monsieur le Curé, who had been shot by the Prussians for having concealed some arms in his house. "A veritable saint, and a patriot, if ever there was one," was her reflection. "His very last words, to some of his friends who were weeping around him at the terrible death that awaited him, were, 'Do not weep for me. I am so happy; so willing to die for God and my country!'

Un homme qui aimait la France—celui-là! un vrai patriote!"

"But since you have not chosen French nationality, and are still living at Sarguemines, you are not French now, and your sons will have to bear arms with the Prussians," I remarked.

"Oh, never!" was the excited retort. "My son is a child of three years old, so I can stay without danger. Before he grows a man, able to bear arms, what will not have happened? All will be changed; and if not, there is emigration still left for him."

I do not cite a French *commerçante* as a very exalted type of patriotism; but, from the fierce tone of her reply, it was evident that the very idea of her son wearing a Prussian uniform was an insult, which even self-interest could not make endurable to her.

Further on in Alsace I learnt the terrible straits to which some families have been brought by the choice of nationality. "Nearly all that have remained by the force of circumstances," one lady told me, "are separated from their sons, who are all sent to Nancy or the nearest French town for education. Nancy is so crowded now, that only a small apartment of five rooms can be obtained at a rent of five thousand francs (about two hundred pounds). We are forced to send our sons away, and cannot have them back even to see us: we are obliged to go to them." Then the everlasting reiteration of inevitable war closes the subject.

Sarguemines is reached, and we have parted with the loquacious representative of French trade and have taken in a new companion, come to join the two French ladies with their little boys. A very different stamp these: types of the upper classes living in retirement on their own property. The gentleman evidently of the same class.

Hearing from his old friends of my nationality, he began at once to speak a few words of English to me. I soon found out that it was more than the usual French vanity that induced him to display his knowledge of our language. "I was in England last December, stopping at the Cannon Street Hotel, during that fog which did so much damage at the Agricultural Hall. I was there," he continued, noticing my surprise that he should choose a City hotel, and at that time of year, "to study the principle of the steam plough."

I put Monsieur de K—y down as a country proprietor in search of recent improvements to introduce among his tenants. He did not leave me long in ignorance of his interest in the steam plough.

"Oh! you cannot think," he exclaimed enthusiastically, "how good the English have been to us Messins. I was shut up in Metz through all the siege. When it was all over it was your compatriots that brought the first relief. Do you know any of the Society of Friends that were sent to us? It is perfectly incredible how liberal and good they were; Ah! how much we owe them!" Then he began enumerating all the great names in the Quaker community, well known indeed for their deeds of mercy at home, that entered Metz immediately upon its fall as messengers of love, at the same time that the Prussians entered—the objects of unutterable hatred. He went on telling how they brought food, clothing, agricultural implements; and, best of all, the steam plough. How they stayed among them all that winter, always doing angels' work: the men in their strength and capacity among the healthy and strong, the women in their tenderness among the sick and weak. How I wish our "friends" in England could have heard how their work was appreciated! "I was one of the most active," he continued, "in getting up the testimonial that the Messins sent to all the members of the deputation, and through them we hope to subscribers all over England and even in the United States."

The tide of his gratitude had ebbed itself out for the moment, and the subject of the siege naturally came to the front. "Do I believe Bazaine was guilty? Indeed I know he was ten times more so than his trial proved him, and had he not been a marshal of France he would certainly have been shot, as he deserved. We, who knew everything that had taken place in Metz, would any of us have been only too glad to have done it ourselves. We knew that he could have held out much longer: knew that offers in abundance were made by opulent and influential men to obtain supplies of food and provender, if only he would hazard some military movement: knew finally that Metz was surrendered upon the understanding that Prussia would reinstate the Emperor, and that the one hundred and seventy thousand men who were to go into captivity from Metz were to bring back and support the fallen dynasty."

Alas! alas! from the bitter tone and words it was evident that the wound was as fresh as ever, and that time had done nothing to calm the feelings of the Messins towards the new masters of their unhappy city!

In quaint, mediæval, busy Strasbourg one could be less oblivious than anywhere else of the change that had taken place. German seemed the universal language; and German soldiers were everywhere. On the Broglie Platz, where the military music plays, they were literally swarming. Superior officers were parading about with the air of proud possession, accompanied by their wives and half-a-dozen fair daughters, or sitting under the trees, drinking beer and smoking to their hearts' content, while the whole avenue was covered with soldiers and the lower class of the townsfolk with their children. Of the gentlefolks, even of the commercial class, there was, however, not one representative. The French people, as the French language, was conspicuous by its complete absence; and I concluded that the sentiments that could keep the French away from anything that had in it the least element of pleasure or display, must be deep rooted indeed.

Only at the cathedral was I unpleasantly impressed on hearing a sermon in French upon the text "Forgive your enemies" applied politically. Sublime maxim!—difficult of application at all times, between nations impossible, till patriotism and independence have become empty words. Time only can effect a change. "Faut du temps," observed my host of the "Mouton," in a small town of the Vosges; "deux générations au moins avant de pouvoir les supporter."

Still, though the annexation is the most fatal effect of the war, involving as it does the probable renewal of hostilities at no very distant date, yet one must in fairness acknowledge that never was conquered country more graciously governed, and never were conquerors individually better conducted. "They do all their possible" (said an inhabitant of Saverne to me) "to make themselves liked; and were they not our enemies, I should really feel sorry for their position. But for all that no one will associate with them. Most of the rich, who could leave, have left. M. About is no solitary instance. Others, like him, have refused to sell their lovely country houses to Prussian bidders; and so they have shut

them up and left them in charge of their gardeners, and will never return until Alsace again changes hands. Those who are forced to remain live in complete retirement; our once gay little town is like dead."

Conciliatory and well-conducted, I judged the Germans indeed to be, from the accounts given me by a lady, the head of a large school for young ladies in the Vosges. Several times during the war she had had twenty-five or thirty soldiers quartered upon her for days together, occupying the lower part of her establishment, while the young ladies were left in quiet possession of the upper stories. "Nothing could be more quiet, modest, and unexacting than their conduct," she observed to me. "They seemed anxious to spare me any unnecessary expense, and were always satisfied with anything that was provided for them. When at one time twenty-eight men, without any officer, were sent, I began to feel very alarmed; but it was quite unnecessary—everything was as quiet as if no soldiers were there. Not one ever ventured beyond their own precincts; and when they used to dine after the young ladies in the dining-hall, they were far more quiet than the girls had been."

"Would French soldiers have been so discreet?" came to the tip of my tongue, when my friend continued—"I cannot boast of the same consideration from the townspeople. I have lived here more than twenty years, and in that time have become completely French; but it was enough that my origin was German, for them to want to wreak their vengeance upon me after the fall of Metz. In that first outburst of frenzy against Germany, the mass of the lower classes here rose simultaneously and threatened to attack my house, where thirty-six young ladies were being educated. It was a terrible moment for me. The doctor took me under his protection, declaring that he would shoot the first man who dared to pass my gates. I meanwhile screwed up my courage to the utmost, and went to the mairie, where I gave notice that it would go badly with any who attempted violence on my house. I had English, French, and German young ladies; above all, I had the daughter of a German general. They might expect summary vengeance if my house were not respected. On hearing this the roughs abandoned their hostile intentions, and my house remained unmolested."

"And has the hostility died out against you?" I asked.

"Among the townspeople, yes. I have been so long among them—for I was educated here, and have lived here nearly all my life—that they know me almost as a Frenchwoman; but some belonging to the upper classes, who were formerly among my best friends, will not approach the house because of my nationality. 'I am sorry I cannot see you or have you to stay with us,' wrote a young lady living not far from here on a large property to one of my pupils, who was her most intimate friend; 'but it is impossible for me to put my foot into that German woman's house.'"

The educated classes who have been forced by their business or property to stay, and who, being without sons, have been able to do so and still to remain French, seem to be the most exasperated of all against the Prussian rule, and treat the Germans with the utmost contempt. "If I see a German coming near me in the street," observed a Colmar lady to me, "I cross to the other side, just as if a leprous or plague-smitten person were approaching me;" and even when circumstances have brought about some slight acquaintance, as is inevitable in large cities, the French man or woman will never vouchsafe the slightest bow or recognition, to such German acquaintances if they happen to meet in the street.

At Colmar, the chief town of the department, irritating changes, increased taxation, forced family separations, with divers other vexations, seem to have filled the cup of bitterness to overflowing. "The town has become the most deadly, dull, stupid place in the world," said one of the inhabitants to me; "dead to everything except hatred of the Germans. I went into a shop the other day, and remarked upon a tapestry pattern that was hanging in the window that it came from Berlin. 'Mon Dieu! mon dieu!' exclaimed the shopkeeper in an agony; 'do not breathe such a thing, I beg of you! I should never have a French customer in my shop again.' 'You should put "Paris" in large letters on it to secure a good stroke of business,' I observed; and the advice was so warmly responded to that I am sure it will be followed."

There is still Mulhouse to speak of, which, though not the *chef lieu*, is the most important town in Alsace; and there the almost exaggerated patriotism of all

classes permits, as yet, of no hope of reconciliation with the Germans.

Mulhouse, with its large population of manufacturers and their workmen, has only become French since 1796, and yet, more than any other town of Alsace, it is heart and soul French—its every interest seems bound up with France—its every heart-beat resents the cruel way in which it has been made over against its will to the power of the conqueror.

And now that I have traversed the annexed provinces from end to end, I think that I am entirely satisfied upon the subject that so interested me in starting, and can fully endorse an opinion that I heard from an Alsatian, "Better far if Prussia had asked double the indemnity, and had not annexed our provinces."

But Strasbourg must be reached again; bright pretty Strasbourg with its wondrous cathedral, its quaint picturesque houses and squares, and its well-known storks still building their nests on the highest chimneys, or swimming so motionless through the air—birds of good omen, perhaps, even in this day of great distress for the city they protect; then on to Paris. But how changed it is from former days! For two hours and more we travel on, and France is not yet reached: over the smiling plains and fertile fields of Alsace to Avricourt, now the frontier station, where first the French official presents himself! And in very truth, English though I am, I had been so grieved and excited by acquaintance with these captive provinces and their people, that when at last I was on French ground, and heard again the language so familiar and so sweet to me, I could have wrung the man's hand from sheer sorrow and sympathy.

Little does any German in Alsace ignore the reception that awaits the French soldier from the inhabitants, the day that he first plants his foot upon the soil of these much loved and much loving provinces, of which France has such reason to be proud. The more necessary is it, then, for the impetuous nation to learn to wait the course of events that may, and most probably will come to its aid to favour the hard struggle that futurity reserves for it. The past has taught the necessity of being ready; wisdom also, and the knowledge of what is passing in Germany, would cry—Bide your time, or as their own proverb expresses it more fully, *Tout vient à point à qui sait attendre.*

"PAY HERE."

ACTING, as a distinct profession, seems to have been known in England at least as far back as the reign of Henry the Sixth. There had been theatrical exhibitions in abundance, however, at a much earlier period. Stow, in his Survey of London, in 1599, translates from the *Life of Thomas à Becket*, by Fitzstephen, who wrote about 1182, mention of "the shews upon theatres and comical pastimes" of London, "its holy playes, representations of miracles which holy confessors have wrought, or representations of tormentes wherein the constancie of martirs appeared." As Mr. Payne Collier observes, "no country in Europe, since the revival of letters, has been able to produce any notice of theatrical performances of so early a date as England." But our primitive stage was a chapel-of-ease, as it were, to the Church. The plays were founded upon the lives of the saints, or upon the events of the Old and New Testaments, and were contrived and performed by the clergy, who borrowed horses, harness, properties, and hallowed vestments from the monasteries, and did not hesitate even to paint and disguise their faces, in order to give due effect to their exhibitions, which were presented, not only in the cathedrals, churches, and cemeteries, but also "on highways or greens," as might be most convenient. In 1511, for instance, the miracle-play of Saint George of Cappadocia was acted in a croft, or field, at Basing-borne, one shilling being paid for the hire of the land. The clergy, however, were by no means unanimous as to the propriety and policy of these dramatic representations. They were bitterly attacked in an Anglo-French poem, the *Manuel de Peché*, written about the middle of the thirteenth century, and ascribed to Robert Grossetête, who became Bishop of Lincoln in 1235. Gradually the kind of histrionic monopoly which the Church had long enjoyed was invaded. Education spread, and many probably found themselves as competent to act as the clergy. Still, the ecclesiastical performers for some time resisted all attempts to interfere with what they viewed as their especial privileges and vested interests. In 1378 the scholars or choristers of St. Paul's petitioned Richard the Second to prohibit certain ignorant and inexperienced persons from acting the History of the Old Testament to the prejudice of the clergy of the Church, who had expended large sums in preparing plays founded upon the same

subject. But some few years later the parish clerks of London, who had been incorporated by Henry the Third, performed at Skinner's Well, near Smithfield, in the presence of the king, queen, and nobles of the realm, a play which occupied three days in representation. As Warton remarks, however, in his History of English Poetry, the parish clerks of that time might fairly be regarded as a "literary society," if they did not precisely come under the denomination of a religious fraternity.

The religious or miracle plays soon extended their boundaries, became blended with "mummings," or "disguisings," and entertainments of pageantry. Morals, interludes, and masques were gradually brought upon the scene. Dancers, singers, jugglers, and minstrels became indispensable to the performances. The Church and the theatre drifted apart; were viewed in time as wholly independent establishments. The actor asserted his individuality; his profession was recognised as distinct and complete in itself; companies of players began to stroll through the provinces. The early moral-play of the Castle of Perseverance, which is certainly as old as the reign of Henry the Sixth, was represented by itinerant actors, who travelled round the country for that purpose, preceded by their standard-bearers and trumpeters, to announce on what day, and at what hour, the performance would take place. It would seem that the exhibition concluded at nine o'clock in the morning, so that the playgoers of the period must probably have assembled so early as six. In the reign of Edward the Fourth the actors first obtained parliamentary recognition. The act passed in 1464, regulating the apparel to be worn by the different classes of society, contains special exception in favour of henchmen, pursuivants, sword-bearers to mayors, messengers, minstrels, and "players in their interludes." The first royal personage who entertained a company of players as his servants was probably Richard the Third when Duke of Gloucester, who seems, moreover, to have given great encouragement to music and musicians. In the reign of Henry the Seventh dramatic representations were frequent in all parts of England. The king himself had two companies of players, the "gentlemen of the chapel," and his "players of interludes."

The early actors, whose performances took place in the open air or in public places, doubtless obtained recompense for

their labours much after the manner of our modern street exhibitors: by that system of "sending round the hat," which too many lookers-on now-a-days consider as an intimation to depart about their business, leaving their entertainment unpaid for. The companies of players in the service of any great personage were paid by regular salaries, were viewed as members of his household, and wore his livery. They probably received, moreover, largess from the more liberally disposed spectators of their exertions. But as the theatre became more and more a source of public recreation, it was deemed necessary to establish permanent stages, and a tariff of charges, for admission to witness the entertainments. For a long time the actors had been restricted to the mansions of the nobility, and to the larger inn-yards of the city. In 1574, however, the Earl of Leicester, through his influence with Queen Elizabeth, obtained for his company of players, among whom was included James Burbadge, the father of the famous Shakespearian actor, Richard Burbadge, a patent, under the great seal, empowering the actors, "during the queen's pleasure, to use, exercise, and occupy the art and faculty of playing tragedies, comedies, interludes, and stage plays, as well for the recreation of the queen's subjects as for her own solace and pleasure, within the City of London and its liberties, and within any cities, towns, and boroughs throughout England." This most important concession to the players was strenuously opposed by the Lord Mayor and Corporation, who maintained that "the playing of interludes and the resort to the same" were likely to provoke "the infection of the plague," were "hurtfull in corruption of youth," were "great wasting both of the time and thrif of many poor people," and "great withdrawing of the people from publique prayer and from the service of God." At last they proposed, as a compromise, that the players of the queen, or of Lord Leicester—for these titles seem to have been bestowed upon the actors indifferently—should be permitted to perform within the city boundaries upon certain special conditions, to the effect that their names and number should be notified to the Lord Mayor and the Justices of Middlesex and Surrey, and that they should not divide themselves into several companies; that they should be content with playing in private houses, at weddings, &c., without public assemblies,

or "if more be thought good to be tolerated," that they should not play openly till the whole deaths in London had been for twenty days under fifty a week; that they should not play on the Sabbath or on holy days until after evening prayer; and that no playing should be in the dark, "nor continue any such time but as any of the auditoire may returne to their dwellings in London before sonne-set, or at least before it be dark." These severe restrictions so far defeated the objects of the civic powers, that they led in truth to the construction of three theatres beyond the Lord Mayor's jurisdiction, but sufficiently near to its boundaries to occasion him grave disquietude. About 1576 Burbadge built his theatre in the Liberty of the Blackfriars—a precinct in which civic authority was at any rate disputed. Within a year or so The Curtain and The Theatre, both in Shoreditch, were also opened to the public. The mayor and corporation persistently endeavoured to assert authority over these establishments, but without much practical result. It may be added that the Blackfriars Theatre was permanently closed in 1647, and part of the ground on which it stood, adjoining Apothecaries' Hall, still bears the name of Playhouse-yard; that the theatre in Shoreditch was abandoned about 1598 (it was probably a wooden erection, and in twenty years might have become untenantable); and that the Curtain fell into disuse at the beginning of the reign of Charles the First.

The prices of admission to the theatres varied according to the estimation in which they were held, and was raised on special occasions. "Twopenny rooms," or galleries, were to be found at the larger and more popular theatres. In Goffe's *Careless Shepherdess*, 1656, acted at the Salisbury Court Theatre, appear the lines—

—I will hasten to the money box
And take my shilling out again,
I'll go to the Bull or Fortune, and there see
A play for two-pence and a jig to boot.

The money received was placed in a box, and there seems to have been one person specially charged with this duty. Dekker, dedicating one of his plays to his "friends and fellows," the queen's servants, wishes them "a full audience and one honest door-keeper." Even thus early the absolute integrity of the attendants of the theatre would appear to have been a subject of suspicion. "Penny galleries" are referred to by some early writers, and from a passage

in the *Gull's Horn Book*, 1609—"Your groundling and gallery commoner buys his sport for a penny"—it is apparent that the charges for admission to the yard, where the spectators stood, and to the galleries where they sat on benches were the same. In Dekker's *Satiromastix*, one of the characters speaks scornfully of "penny bench theatres," where "a gentleman or an honest citizen" might sit "with his squirrel by his side cracking nuts." But according to the *Induction to Ben Jonson's Bartholomew Fair*, first acted in 1614, at the Hope, a small dirty theatre on the Bank-side, which had formerly been used for bear-baiting, the prices there ranged from sixpence to half-a-crown. "It shall be lawful for any man to judge his six pen'-worth, his twelve pen'-worth, so to his eighteen pence, two shillings, half-a-crown, to the value of his place; provided always his place get not above his wit . . . Marry, if he drop but sixpence at the door, and will censure a crown's worth, it is thought there is no conscience or justice in that." So in the *Induction to his Magnetic Lady*, Jonson speaks of "Your people that sit in the oblique caves and wedges of your house, your sinful sixpenny mechanicks." It is probable, however, that the dramatist was referring to the prices charged at the first representation of his play. Sixpence might then be the lowest admission; on other occasions, twopence, or even one penny.

The *Prologue to Henry the Eighth* states—

Those that come to see
Only a show or two, and so agree
The play may pass; if they be still and willing
I'll undertake may see away their shilling
Richly in two short hours.

And there is evidence that in Shakespeare's time one shilling was the price of admission to the best rooms or boxes. Sir Thomas Overbury writes in *Characters*, published in 1614: "If he have but twelve pence in his purse he will give it for the best room in a play-house." And the *Gull's Horn Book*, 1609, counsels, "At a new play you take up the twelvepenny room next the stage, because the lords and you may seem to be hail fellow well met!"

But it is plain that the tariff of admissions was subject to frequent alteration, and that as money became more abundant, the managers gradually increased their charges. In the *Scornful Lady* "eighteen pence" is referred to as though it were the highest price of admission to the Blackfriars Theatre. Sir John Suckling

writes, probably about the middle of the seventeenth century—

The sweat of learned Jonson's brain,
And gentle Shakespeare's easier strain,
A hackney coach conveys you to,
In spite of all that rain can do,
And for your eighteen-pence you sit,
The lord and judge of all fresh wit.

It must always be doubtful, however, as to the precise portion of the theatre these writers intended to designate. As Mr. Collier suggests, the discordances between the authorities on this question arise, no doubt, from the fact that "different prices were charged at different theatres at different periods."

In our early theatres, the arrangements for receiving the money of the playgoers were rather of a confused kind. There would seem to have been several doors, one within the other, at any of which visitors might tender their admission money. It was understood that he who, disapproving the performance, withdrew after the termination of the first act of the play, was entitled to receive back the amount he had paid for his entrance. This system led to much brawling and fraud. The matter was deemed important enough to justify royal intervention. An order was issued in 1665, reciting that complaints had been made by "our servants, the actors in the Royal Theatre," of divers persons refusing to pay at the first door of the said theatre, thereby obliging the doorkeepers to send after, solicit, and importune them for their entrance-money, and stating it to be the royal will and pleasure, for the prevention of these disorders, and so that such as are employed by the said actors might have no opportunity of deceiving them, that all persons thenceforward coming to the said theatre should at the first door pay their entrance-money, which was to be restored to them again in case they returned the same way before the end of the act. The guards attending the theatre, and all others whom it might concern, were charged to see that this order was obeyed, and to return to the Lord Chamberlain the names of such persons as offered "any violence contrary to this our pleasure."

Apparently the royal decree was not very implicitly obeyed by the playgoers. At any rate we find, under date, January the 7th, 1668, the following entry in Mr. Pepys's Diary bearing upon the matter. "To the Nursery, but the house did not act to-day; and so I to the other two playhouses, into the pit, to gaze up and down, and there did by this means for

nothing see an act in the School of Compliments, at the Duke of York's house, and Henry the Fourth at the King's House; but not liking either of the plays, I took my coach again, and home." At the trial of Lord Mohun, in 1692, for the murder of Mountford, the actor, John Rogers, one of the doorkeepers of the theatre, deposes that he applied to his lordship and to Captain Hill, his companion, "for the overplus of money for coming in, because they came out of the pit upon the stage. They would not give it. Lord Mohun said if I brought any of our masters he would slit their noses." It was the fashion for patrons of the stage at this time to treat its professors with great scorn, and often to view them with a kind of vindictive jealousy. "I see the gallants do begin to be tired with the vanity and pride of the theatre actors, who are indeed grown very proud and rich," noted Pepys, in 1661. In the second year of her reign, Queen Anne issued a decree "for the better regulation of the theatres," the drama being at this period the frequent subject of royal interference, and strictly commanded that "no person of what quality soever should presume to go behind the scenes, or come upon the stage, either before or during the acting of any play; that no woman should be allowed, or presume to wear, a vizard mask in either of the theatres; and that no person should come into either house without paying the price established for their respective places."

As the stage advanced more and more in public favour, the actors ceased to depend for existence upon private patronage, and found it unnecessary to be included among the retinue and servants of the great. After the Restoration patents were granted to Killigrew and Davenant, and their companies were described as the servants of the king and of the Duke of York respectively; but individual noblemen no longer maintained and protected "players of interludes" for their own private amusement. And now the court began to come to the drama, instead of requiring that the drama should be invariably carried to the court. Charles the Second was probably the first English monarch who joined with the general audience, and occupied a box at a public theatre. In addition, he followed the example of preceding sovereigns, and had plays frequently represented before him at Whitehall and other royal resi-

dences. These performances took place at night, and were brilliantly lighted with wax candles. The public representations were in the afternoon, and usually illumined with some three pounds of tallow candles, although Killigrew claimed credit for introducing "wax candles, and many of them," at the Theatre Royal. With the fall of the Stuart dynasty the court theatricals ceased almost altogether. Indeed, in Charles's time there had been much decline in the dignity and exclusiveness of these entertainments; admission seems to have been obtainable upon payment at the doors as though at a public theatre. Evelyn writes in 1675: "I saw the Italian Scaramuccio act before the king at Whitehall, people giving money to come in, which was very scandalous, and never so before at court diversions. Having seen him act in Italy many years past, I was not averse from seeing the most excellent of that kind of folly."

It is to be observed that in Pepys's time, and long afterwards, the prices of admission to the theatres were: boxes four shillings, pit two shillings and sixpence, first gallery, one shilling and sixpence, and upper gallery one shilling. He records, in 1667, his occupying a seat in the boxes for the first time in his life, and alludes with regret to the number of "ordinary prentices and mean people," he observes, "in the pit at two shillings and sixpence apiece; I going for several years no higher than the twelvepence and then the eighteenpence, though I strained hard to go in then when I did." It long continued to be the custom to raise the prices whenever great expenses had been incurred by the manager in the production of a new play or of a pantomime. A disturbance in Drury Lane Theatre in 1744, on account of the alleged capriciousness of the manager in varying his tariff of charges, led to a notification in the playbills, to the effect that "whenever a pantomime or farce shall be advertised, the advanced prices shall be returned to those who do not choose to stay." As the patent theatres were enlarged or rebuilt, however, the higher rate of charges became permanently established. After the famous O. P. riots the scale agreed upon was: Boxes, seven shillings; pit, three shillings; galleries, two shillings and one shilling; with half price at nine o'clock. In later times these charges have been considerably reduced. Half price has been generally abolished, however, and many rows of the pit have been converted into stalls at seven shillings each, or even

more. Altogether, it may perhaps be held that in western London, although theatrical entertainments have been considerably cheapened, they still tax the pockets of playgoers more severely than need be.

Country managers would seem to have ruled their scale of charges in strict accordance with the means of their patrons; to have been content, indeed, with anything they could get from the provincial playgoers. Mr. Bernard, the actor, in his *Retrospections*, makes mention of a strolling manager, once famous in the north of England and in Ireland, and known popularly as Jemmy Whitely, who, in impoverished districts, was indifferent as to whether he received the public support in money or "in kind." It is related of him that he would take meat, fowl, vegetables, &c., and pass in the owner and friends for as many admissions as the food was worth. Thus very often on a Saturday, his treasury resembled a butcher's warehouse, rather than a banker's. At a village on the coast the inhabitants brought him nothing but fish; but as the company could not subsist without its concomitants of bread, potatoes, and spirits, a general appeal was made to his stomach and sympathies, and some alteration in the terms of admission required. Jemmy, accordingly, after admitting nineteen persons one evening for a shad apiece, stopped the twentieth, and said, "I beg your pardon, my darling, I am extremely sorry to refuse you; but if we eat any more fish, by the powers, we shall all be turned into mermaids."

A famous provincial manager, or manageress, was one Mrs. Baker, concerning whom curious particulars are related in the memoirs of Thomas Dibdin, and in the *Life of Grimaldi*, the clown. The lady owned theatres at Canterbury, Rochester, Maidstone, Tunbridge Wells, Faversham, Deal, and other places, but was understood to have commenced her professional career in connection with a puppet-show, or even the homely entertainment of Punch and Judy. But her industry, energy, and enterprise were of an indomitable kind. She generally lived in her theatres, and rising early to accomplish her marketing and other household duties, she proceeded to take up her position in the box-office, with the box-book open before her, and resting upon it "a massy silver inkstand, which, with a superb pair of silver trumpets, several cups, tankards, and candlesticks of the same pure metal, it was her

honest pride to say she had paid for with her own hard earnings." While awaiting the visits of those desirous to book their places for the evening, she arranged the programme of the entertainments. Her education was far from complete, however, for although she could read, she was but an indifferent scribe. By the help of scissors, needle, thread, and a bundle of old playbills, she achieved her purposes. She cut a play from one bill, an interlude from another, a farce from a third, and sewing the slips neatly together avoided the use of pen and ink. When the name of a new performer had to be introduced she left a blank to be filled up by the first of her actors she happened to encounter, presuming him to be equal to the use of a pen. She sometimes beat the drum, or tolled the bell behind the scenes, when the representation needed such embellishments, and occasionally fulfilled the duties of prompter. In this respect it was unavoidable that she should be now and then rather overtired. On one special evening she held the book during the performance of the old farce of *Who's the Duke?* The part of *Gradus* was undertaken by her leading actor, one Gardner, and in the scene of *Gradus's* attempt to impose upon the gentleman of the story, by affecting to speak Greek, the performer's memory unfortunately failed him. He glanced appealingly towards the prompt-side of the stage. Mrs. Baker was mute, examining the play-book with a puzzled air. "Give me the word, madam," whispered the actor. "It's a hard word, Jem," the lady replied. "Then give me the next?" "That's harder." The performer was at a stand-still; the situation was becoming desperate. "The next," cried Gardner, furiously. "Harder still!" answered the prompter, and then, perplexed beyond bearing, she flung the book on the stage, and exclaimed, aloud: "There, now, you have them all; take your choice."

The lady's usual station was in front of the house, however. She was her own money-taker, and to this fact has been ascribed the great good fortune she enjoyed as a manager. "Now then, pit or box, pit or gallery, box or pit!" she cried incessantly. "Pit! Pit!" half-a-dozen voices might cry. "Then pay two shillings. Pass on, Tom Fool!" for so on busy nights she invariably addressed her patrons of all classes. To a woman who had to quit the theatre, owing to the cries of the child she bore in her arms disturbing the audience,

Mrs. Baker observed, as she returned the entrance-money, "Foolish woman! Foolish woman! Don't come another night till half-price, and then give your baby some *Dalby's Carminative*." "I remember," writes Dibdin, "one very crowded night, patronised by a royal duke at Tunbridge Wells, when Mrs. Baker was taking money for three doors at once, her anxiety and very proper tact led her, while receiving cash from one customer, to keep an eye in perspective on the next, to save time, as thus: "Little girl! get your money ready, while this gentleman pays. My lord! I'm sure your lordship has silver. Let that little boy go in while I give his lordship change. Shan't count after your ladyship. Here comes the duke! Make haste! His royal highness will please to get his ticket ready while my lady—now sir! Now your royal highness!" "Oh dear, Mrs. Baker, I've left my ticket in another coat pocket!" "To be sure you have! Take your royal highness's word! Let his royal highness pass! His royal highness has left his ticket in his *other* coat-pocket." Great laughter followed, and I believe the rank and fashion of the evening found more entertainment in the loby than on the stage.

On the occasion of *Grimaldi's* engagement, "for one night only," it was found necessary to open the doors of the Maidstone Theatre at a very early hour, to relieve the thoroughfare of the dense crowd which had assembled. The house, being quite full, Mrs. Baker locked up the box in which the receipts of the evening had been deposited, and, going round to the stage, directed the performances to be commenced forthwith, remarking, reasonably enough, "that the house could but be full, and being full to the ceiling now, they might just as well begin at once, and have business over so much the sooner." Greatly to the satisfaction of the audience, the representation accordingly began without delay, and terminated shortly after nine o'clock.

It should be added that Mrs. Baker had been a dancer in early life, and was long famed for the grace of her carriage and the elegance of her curtsey. Occasionally she ventured upon the stage dressed in the bonnet and shawl she had worn while receiving money and issuing checks at the door, and in audible tones announced the performances arranged for future evenings, the audience enthusiastically welcoming her appearance. A measure of her manifold talents was shared by other members of her family. Her sister, Miss Wakelin,

was principal comic dancer to the theatre, occasional actress, wardrobe-keeper, and professed cook, being rewarded for her various services by board and lodging, a salary of a guinea and a half per week, and a benefit in every town Mrs. Baker visited, with other emoluments by way of perquisites. Two of Mrs. Baker's daughters were also members of her company, and divided between them the heroines of tragedy and comedy. One Miss Baker subsequently became the wife of Mr. Downton, the actor.

A settled distrust of the Bank of England was one of Mrs. Baker's most marked peculiarities. At the close of the performance she resigned the position she had occupied for some five hours as moneymaker for pit, boxes, and gallery, and retired to her chamber, carrying the receipts of the evening in a large front pocket. This money she added to a store contained in half-a-dozen large china punch-bowls, ranged upon the top shelf of an old bureau. For many years she carried her savings about with her from town to town, sometimes retaining upon her person gold in rouleaux to a large amount. She is even said to have kept in her pocket for seven years a note for two hundred pounds. At length her wealth became a positive embarrassment to her. She invested sums in county banks and in the hands of respectable tradesmen, at three per cent., sometimes without receiving any interest whatever, but merely with a view to the safer custody of her resources. It was with exceeding difficulty that she was eventually persuaded to become a fundholder. She handed over her store of gold to her stockbroker with extraordinary trepidation. It is satisfactory to be assured that at last she accorded perfect confidence to the Old Lady in Threadneedle-street, increased her investments from time to time, and learned to find pleasure in visiting London half-yearly to receive her dividends.

Altogether Mrs. Baker appears to have been a thoroughly estimable woman, cordially regarded by the considerate members of the theatrical profession with whom she had dealings. While recording her eccentricities, and conceding that occasionally her language was more forcible and idiomatic than tasteful or refined, Dibdin hastens to add that "she owned an excellent heart, with much of the appearance and manners of a gentlewoman." Grimaldi was not less prompt in expressing his complete satisfaction in regard to his engage-

ments with "the manageress." Dibdin wrote the epitaph inscribed above her grave in the cathedral yard of Rochester. A few lines may be extracted, but it must be said that the composition is of inferior quality:

Alone, untaught,
And self-assisted (save by Heaven), she taught
To render each his own, and fairly save
What might help others when she found a grave,
By prudence taught life's troubled waves to stem,
In death her memory shines, a rich, unpolished gem.

It is conceivable—so much may perhaps be added by way of concluding note—that Mrs. Baker unconsciously posed as a model, and lent a feature or two, when the portrait came to be painted of even a more distinguished manageress, whose theatre was a caravan, however, whose company consisted of waxen effigies, and who bore the name of Jarley.

AFTER NIGHT.

UP-SPRINGS the lark all boisterous, jubilant,
From out the yellow wheat, with vigorous flight,
Breasting the heaven's blue—his clear, shrill pipe,
With burst of music, sunrise welcoming,
And gladdening his brooding mate below.

Light lies the silver mist in filmy veil
On the pink cressets of the clover-buds,
Whose dew-tipped clusters, feel not yet the warmth,
Of the new-risen sun.

A feathery web

Of fairy gossamer sits on the furze,
And with a maze of glistening tracery,
Of elfin cords, joins in a stately troop,
Of bristling helms, the downy thistle-tufts,
And veils the beadlets blue of blaue berries,
That shelter 'neath the fern. The brambles show
Their black and scarlet store of ripening fruit
Adown the chalky hollows; and from copse
The sprightly rabbit with white-glinting tail,
Darts to the sweet and fragrant border-grass,
That skirts the winding path unto the stile.
Aurora, rosy-fingered goddess fair,
Turneth her white steeds homewards, in her track
Rolls up the golden car of glorious Day!

ON THE GREAT MAROONS.

I HAD never been the same man since the day on which I read, in the Cuba Patriot, one of those announcements over which a careless eye is apt to glance with such utter unconcern, but every word of which seemed for long after to have burned itself into my brain. She was dead, then. Dear, beautiful Jessie Mainwaring was dead. It was at Havannah, in that fair and treacherous climate, where life seems a perpetual holiday, and where Death, crowned with flowers, lurks unsuspected at the banquet, that I had known and loved her. My prospects had been until then bright and hopeful. I, Osborne Vaughan by name, and born an Englishman, had passed several years in Cuba. I

had left the island a few months previously, to accept a place of trust in the house of an eminent firm in Philadelphia, where, through the recommendation of Mr. Mainwaring, the father of my future bride, I had an almost certainty of being taken into partnership. All seemed to smile upon me, when a paragraph in a Cuban newspaper recorded the probable loss of the *Dona Carmen* steamer, bound from Havannah to New York, in which, as I was but too well aware, the whole Mainwaring family had embarked. Subsequent enquiries only served to confirm the gloomy conjecture. Whether the Spanish steam-packet, in which Mr. Mainwaring, his wife, sons, and daughter, were passengers, had foundered at sea, or had been wrecked on some shoal or rock off the coast-line, was unknown. But the one bare, cruel fact remained. The *Dona Carmen* was a lost ship, and she whom I loved better than my life had been on board the doomed vessel. The events of the succeeding weeks I can scarcely recall. I only remember that I gave up my appointment, with all its contingent advantages, unable as I was to confront the associations and memories which they evoked. I quitted Philadelphia, roamed for a while restlessly from city to city, and finally sojourned for a time at Kingston, in North Carolina.

During my stay at Kingston, I accidentally learned that an assistant lighthouse keeper was required on the Great Maroons, the largest of that dangerous chain of sandy islets which fringe the coast for leagues. It was a post for which there were few competitors, and on applying to an official friend, I readily obtained it. "The Great Maroons," said Mr. Wilmot, as he smilingly acceded to my request, "is not, I warn you, an agreeable place of residence, for a man of education. The chief custodian, a worn-out sailor, who led a wild life, I believe, in his youth—old Jonah Derring—is now very aged, infirm, and ill. His assistants, I fear, have been sad rowdies, hitherto, the drunken refuse of the Irish or German immigrants, for few can face the terrible solitude and monotony of that uninhabited spot. Three resignations, to say nothing of a brace of deserters, have occurred during my brief tenure of office. However, the lighthouse is an important one, and we must maintain the station, although the silly creatures who are tempted by Government pay and rations

do take into their empty heads the absurd idea that the place is haunted." "Haunted!" I repeated, in some perplexity. It was the first time that, in the New World, allusion had been made in my hearing to those superstitious terrors, which I had deemed peculiar to the Old. I was, however, informed that the whole cluster of desolate islets, once the resort of buccaneers, bore but a bad name along the coast, and especially was this the case with the Great Maroons, where strange and cruel deeds were reported to have been done, in days long past.

"Old Derring—Captain Jonah—as they call him;" said my friend; "seems proof against these rumours that scare away the timorous recruits we send him—but then he was a pirate himself, and a slaver too, unless he be greatly maligned, and is not easily frightened. Such as he is, delirium tremens and natural decay must soon create a vacancy on the Maroons, and if you retain your present fancy for a hermit life, Mr. Vaughan, you may expect soon to be promoted to the office which your moribund senior now holds."

And indeed, when the pinnace that went out weekly from the mainland with provisions and fresh water, had set me ashore on the Great Maroons—a mere desolate waste of yellow sand, rank grass, and tangled shrubs—I found the chief lighthouse keeper the broken wreck of a man. Ill as he was, with trembling limbs, and a racking cough that shook his huge frame painfully at short intervals; and aged as his white hair, and the blanched pallor of his sunbrowned face declared him to be, he was yet evidently one who had formerly possessed extraordinary strength and unusual energy. I am not, I hope, unduly timid by nature; yet, I own that the first survey which I took of this crippled giant as he lay in his hammock, which was slung from the ceiling of a long, low room in the lighthouse, inspired me with a sensation that was akin to fear. There were the marks of more than one ugly scar upon the old man's bronzed face, and the bloodshot eyes that peered at me from beneath his beetling brows were fierce and angry; while his voice was anything but gentle as he raised himself on one brawny arm, seamed with strange patterns tattooed on it in dark blue tracery, and said, gruffly, "What cheer, shipmate? Not a lawyer, are you, mister? Guess if you're any landshark of that sort, you'd best give a wide berth to old Jo Derring, for all the

rotten, useless hull you take him to be!" And, as he spoke, he thrust his shaking hand into the breast pocket of the rough monkey jacket which he wore, as if to grasp the handle of some concealed weapon.

Once assured of my true character, and of what was the errand that had brought me to the island, Old Derring became sufficiently civil, although his politeness was, at the best, like the friendliness of an imperfectly tamed bear, that growled amicably, but might on slender provocation be expected to use its teeth and claws. He was glad, he told me, to see an assistant who, landsman though he were, was likely to be worth his salt, whereas nothing but threats and cuffs would keep the majority of his subordinates to their light but troublesome duty. And I think I rose in his estimation when I declined the tin pannikin of fiery Bourbon whisky which he pressed upon me. "All the better for you, young chap, if you can do without your allowance of grog," he said. "I can't; at least, not here on this infernal Heaven-forsaken tongue of sand; but I mean to pitch the bottle overboard, once for all, when I resign and go North, as I'll do before the fall, once I patch up and grow stronger, or my name's not Jonah." It seemed evident to me that Old Derring was very ill—much more ill, probably, than he himself knew or cared to admit, and that his prospects of recovery were rendered none the brighter by the quantities of liquor which he contrived, as confirmed dram-drinkers will, to swallow during his waking moments. The strong drink which habit had made necessary to him did not, it is true, affect his brain, except that as the day waned he grew somewhat more reckless and boastful in his talk, which was garnished with strange oaths and nautical jargon, and the tone of which left very little doubt, to my mind, of the truth of the allegations as to a youth and prime spent amid scenes of lawless violence and rapine.

To all this I had made up my mind before embarking for the Maroons, and so far from repining at the dreary loneliness of the place, its very solitude had been the magnet which had attracted me thither. It did not take me long to learn all that was necessary concerning the details of my duty; the trimming and tending of the lamps, reflectors, and other gear; where the stores were kept; and where, in case of need, I was to look for the signals, by the aid of

which it was possible to communicate with the mainland. Supper over, and the lamp kindled in the lofty lantern overhead, I left the lighthouse, where the chief keeper alone had his quarters, and proceeded to my own dwelling, a mere hut of well-tarred timber, but snug and weather-tight, the scanty furniture of which consisted of a broken table, two chairs, and a rickety iron bedstead on which I had laid the mattresses that I had been advised to bring with me. "We keep watch and watch, as aboard ship;" old Derring had explained; "You may turn in first, and I'll give you a call through the speaking trumpet when it's time for you to take your spell at the look out."

I felt, however, very little inclination for sleep, and sat long musing by the dull gleam of the small kerosene lamp that illumined the rugged walls of the cabin that was my apartment. It stood at the distance of a pistol shot from the lighthouse, adjoining an unfinished building that had probably been intended to contain stores of some kind, but had never been roofed in, and was, with the exception of the lighthouse and my hut, the only structure on the island, which was, as I have said, an uninhabited one. I sat for some time, perhaps an hour, listening moodily to the moan of the night-wind and the dash of the waves as they broke ceaselessly on reef and shoal, while my thoughts wandered far, far away. What was that? A shriek, sharp, agonised, intolerably painful to the startled ear, and apparently near at hand! Convinced that some one was in peril or suffering close by me, I sprang hurriedly to my feet, calling aloud, and pushing open the rude door, emerged into the outer air. To my great surprise, although I turned successively towards every point of the compass, I could see nothing. There were the bare stretches of yellow sand, the melancholy sea, with its line of foam, the reeds and rank grass through which the breeze sighed mournfully, the towering lantern turret of the lighthouse, whence the beacon sent its warning radiance far and wide over the darkling deep; but that was all. Half believing that I had been the dupe of an excited imagination, I returned to my hut, and waited there until the old sailor's hoarse summons caused me to take my share of watchfulness.

On the ensuing night I heard, or thought I heard, a sound as of sobbing, followed by a long-drawn wailing cry, such as might

well have proceeded from the lips of a sick child, but on rushing from my hut I could perceive nothing, and began to conjecture that I had been deceived by my own gloomy fancies, or had possibly mistaken the wild, harsh note of some sea bird for the accents of a human voice. I returned to my primitive couch, and after a time fell into a heavy sleep, from which I was abruptly awakened by a shriek so loud, shrill, and appalling, that I lost not a moment in hurrying forth, turning towards the spot whence, as I judged, the cry had proceeded. This time the wan moon, then but a crescent of pale light, peeped for a short space from amidst the wrack of driving clouds, and by that pallid and flickering gleam I thought that I beheld a black-robed form glide phantom-like amidst the tall tamarisks and waving reeds, and vanish in a direction opposite to that of the lighthouse. I ran, shouting aloud, towards the place where the figure had appeared, but just then the moon again hid her face behind the scud of hurrying clouds, and when the next faint glimpse of moonlight became visible nothing could be seen, save the shrubs and tall herbage tossing in the wind. After a protracted search, I came to the conclusion that my own morbid condition of mind had caused me to people that lonely place with haunting phantasms, and that I had no doubt exaggerated the effect of natural sounds and sights, influenced partly, in all likelihood, by my own carking sorrow, and partly by the innate tendency to superstitious fears from which none of us are wholly free.

I can scarcely explain what was the feeling which prevented me from saying a word to the chief lighthouse keeper, concerning what I fancied that I had seen and heard. But, indeed, old Jonah Derring was not likely to prove a very sympathetic confidant; while on the third day of my stay on the Great Maroons, a notable change for the worse took place in his health. I found him in the morning unusually haggard-eyed and feverish, and his talk seemed wilder and more incoherent than it had been on previous occasions. He was very feeble and tremulous, but treated with scorn my hesitating remonstrance regarding the amount of liquor, unusually great as it seemed to me, which he imbibed. "Let Jo Derring alone to pick and choose his own medicine, young chap!" he said, as he took off his fourth dram; "and do you go aloft and

look to the lamps. There's dirty weather brewing. Even a landlubber can see that, I guess, can't he?"

I told him, yes. My meteorological knowledge was nothing remarkable, but I must have been blind indeed not to note the signs of a threatening storm. The scud of clouds went driving fast overhead; white-winged sea-fowl flew screaming shorewards; the breakers were loud and hoarse. Rough weather was certainly impending, and all day the force of the wind increased, until towards evening a dense black cloud-bank had gathered on the horizon, and at sunset the flashes of the lightning and the roll of the thunder added their terrors to the deep diapason of the tempest.

Curiously enough, my aged colleague's failing health seemed to be in some inexplicable manner affected by the advent of the coming storm. His cough was all but unremitting, and he shook and quivered as if ague stricken, talking almost incessantly, but seldom raising his husky voice beyond a semi-audible growl that partook more of the nature of soliloquy than of conversation. Before evening, noting his increasing weakness, and how constant, in spite of all I could say, was his resort to strong stimulants, I felt it my duty to urge him to allow me to signal to the shore for the medical attendance which his condition so clearly required. But he repulsed the suggestion with jeers and curses. Doctors, he said, were only fit to feel the pulses and pouch the fees of chicken-hearted stay-at-homes. If only the confounded snap of rough weather would come and go, he, Captain Jonah, should right, and ride well through it into port. I signal the shore, while he commanded on the Maroons! Never, if I cared to die in my bed! He, old as I might think him, would just as soon blow off the roof of a mutineer's skull as not. He had done as much, and worse, too, to many a better man. And he twitched his knife in its shark-skin sheath, and toyed with the brass-bound butt of his pistol, as if a murder would have been rather a congenial occupation than otherwise.

Later on, when twilight had fallen, old Derring seemed to have forgotten his momentary irritation, and lay gasping and moaning on his pillows, asking me, now and again, to do him some kind office, such as moistening his parched lips with rum-and-water, or propping his heavy head in a more convenient attitude, for now he drew his breath painfully and

with an evident effort. He kept muttering strange words, half of which I lost, but others had manifest reference to his ill-spent life, and I could easily conjecture that his conscience pricked him somewhat, seared though it was by evil passions and recklessness. "The brig fired first," he murmured, hoarsely, "and when one's blood is up who can stop? Besides, we were a scratch crew, and the black savages and the Spaniards did the most of the mischief. If only they'd struck the flag and lain to when we ranged up alongside—but for all that, I'd like to silence those shrieks—curses on them! they ring in my ears still!" And at that very moment a long, wailing cry, as of anguish and woe unutterable, reached my ears, and caused my very blood to freeze with horror, and my heart to suspend its pulsations. But either the sound did not make itself distinct to the dulled senses of the old man, or he considered it to be the mere product of his heated fancy, for he presently said:—"Ay! ay! fifty years and more, and fresh as if I still saw the vessel going down, down, and heard the voices on her blood-stained deck, where the women knelt screeching among the corpses, or tried to lift their children into the rigging to save a few poor moments of life before the waterlogged hull sank bodily. An old story! It ought to be forgot long since. Odd how my memory runs on old times, to-night. As for the ebony trade, a man couldn't afford to be over nice in that. What, if we did heave 'em overboard, a hundred and eighty of them, shackled to the schooner's best bowser anchor, off the Nun River's mouth, when the British cruiser pressed us hard? We'd have been ruined if the craft had been condemned at the Cape—and who cares for a few score woollyheads more or less—give me a sip of the comforter, messmate; and, I say, just kick out yonder black dog, will you—how came the brute here? I'd shoot it, if my hand didn't tremble so."

So complete was the tone of conviction in which the old man spoke, that I turned instinctively to look towards the quarter indicated by the pointing of his shaking forefinger; but there was no dog there. Presently the thunder boomed, and the red glare of the lightning crossed the narrow windows, and the noise of the wind and sea increased as darkness fell. I now remembered that it was time to kindle the beacon above, and ascending the ladder to the high lantern, I at once lighted the

lamp and adjusted the reflector; but, as I did so, I again heard a piercing shriek of distress, and caught sight, for an instant, of the black-robed figure which I conceived myself to have seen on the first night of my stay on the Maroons—a female form, to all appearance just vanishing among the bushes waving in the wind. Moved by an impulse that I could not stay to analyse, I darted down the ladder. "Mr. Derring," I said, almost forgetting in my agitation how critical was the condition of the old man whom I addressed, "Did you not hear that cry? There is some one on the island, I am certain, some one in pain, or in mortal alarm. Perhaps a ship—" "What of that!" broke out old Derring, who had gathered the drift of my last words; "What if the ship did run aground here, and all hands lost, through mistaking the lights, the lubberly buzzards—was it my business to jabber and prate about spilt milk, or drowned humans! Drive that black dog away! keep the brute off! he'll fasten his gnashing teeth in my throat next, I know it. How his red eye glares at me—keep him off, I say—and give me drink—I'm old and weak. Take the revolver and the knife; I'm too old and weak to use them." I gave the sufferer a draught of rum-and-water, first removing the weapons, which I was thankful to put beyond his reach, for in his then state of frenzy he might at any moment have attempted his own life, or mine; at the same time using some soothing expressions, such as were dictated by a natural sentiment of compassion. The black hound, I told him, had gone away. There was no danger now. But I begged him not to excite himself by talking too much. I had seen other patients under the influence of the terrible malady which had now prostrated old Derring, and could not help pitying the mental and physical anguish which he underwent, hardened miscreant though he might be.

To my surprise the alcohol acted as a sedative on the overstrung nerves of the old pirate. "Thank ye, my lad!" he said, calmly and thoughtfully; "that draught has cleared my addled brain, and I begin to see my bearings. I'll never get better, young chap. I feel that, and I know it. I tried, many's the day, to keep a stout heart, and look forward to clearing out of this den of a place, with a tidy lump of dollars to comfort my old days—but now I feel that I was only cheating myself. If I live till daybreak, it's about

all. Are you a judge of jewels?" Then, seeing my look of surprise in answer to this abrupt inquiry, he added, impatiently; "Take the key that lies beside the stone jar yonder on the table. Unlock that sea-chest in the corner, and bring me the case you'll find wrapped in a flannel shirt." I obeyed, taking from its hiding-place a large case or casket in red leather, with a gilt lock, the latter having evidently been forced. "Now open it, and tell me the worth of the sparklers inside," said the sick man. I complied, disclosing to view a number of very handsome and costly diamond ornaments that glittered as the lamp flashed upon them. "These are no doubt very valuable," said I; "although I have no conception of their precise worth. What would you wish me to—" "To give the shining things, I'd nigh sold my soul for, back to their true owner," interrupted Derring. "Tis some months, now, since a Spanish built steamer perished—ship, crew, and passengers—on the Maroons here. I was alone in charge, for my assistant had left, and no one had yet been found to replace him. Not much was washed ashore, but I got a few things, and the best of them are these diamonds. I counted on them, once I got well and made tracks, to live on, in comfort, but, day by day, I grew worse and weaker, and—Heaven's mercy on a great sinner—what is that?" For now the fearful cry which I had repeatedly heard was again uttered, and this time so near as to force itself on the deafened ear of the dying wretch, who struggled up into a sitting posture, and with lips that worked and writhed without speaking, pointed to the open door. What figure, in female garb of tattered black, with loose hair hanging dishevelled, with pallid face and gleaming lustrous eyes, stood there, beckoning? "Jessie!" I exclaimed, as the apparition turned its face towards me. "Jessie Mainwaring, my own, my loved and lost!" And hardly knowing whether I beheld my unforgotten love in the spirit or in the flesh, I slowly approached her; but with a wild and mocking laugh that chilled the very marrow in my bones, she turned and darted out into the darkness of the night. Uncertain whether the vision I had beheld was of supernatural origin or no, I yet pursued in breathless haste the route which it had appeared to take, and after struggling through the tangled shrubs I came in sight of the sandy beach on the

seaward side of the island, on which the huge waves now beat furiously, while the strength of the wind, as it dashed the spray in my face, seemed to increase every moment. Ha! What was yonder figure, black-robed, slender, with a weird grace that had something unearthly and saddening about it, that now stood, on a steeply sloping sandbank, with one arm outstretched over the boiling waters that chafed and roared below! Was I the dupe of a diseased fancy, or was this in very truth a disembodied spirit that hovered thus before my dazzled eyes, dimly seen by the ominous radiance of the lightning flashes that lit up sea and shore, only to deepen the blackness of the gloom when their fitful brightness had passed away? That shriek again, and then a sobbing sound, as of passionate weeping! Assured that, whatever I had before my eyes, it was at least human, I rushed forward, and soon reached the spot, and as I did so a shaft of fire seemed to glance down from the clouds, making all around as light as at noonday, and I saw that, but a few feet off, was she whom I had believed to be sleeping beneath the waves, but how changed! Haggard, pale, with a strange and terrible light in her restless eyes, her hair hanging wildly over her black robe, beautiful still, but with something of the desperate expression of some hunted creature brought to bay, was the girl whom I had last seen the petted idol of a happy and united family. The crackling of the dry sand beneath my tread made her start, and as she did so, I could restrain myself no longer, calling her name aloud; "Jessie! dear Jessie!" I laid my hand upon her wrist, but she eluded me, as if in fear, and with a dreadful cry, half shriek, half laugh, sprang down the steep bank into the sea, and was instantly sucked out from the shore by the foaming reflux of a wave.

I have never been able thoroughly to realise what followed. That I strove, frantically strove, to save Jessie from the death that in her madness—for, alas! there could be no doubt but that her reason had given way—she had sought, and that I nearly lost my own life in the attempt, I know. I remember, too, how, bruised by the surges and exhausted, I ceased swimming, and let the strong current work its will with me, and how, when I recovered from a swoon that must have lasted long, I found myself lying, half submerged, on a spit of sand, sheltered by a projecting head-

land from the full fury of the billows, and with some difficulty, after long pacing the shore in the vain hope of seeing any trace of Jessie, contrived to crawl to the lighthouse. Here a new sensation awaited me. Old Derring was lying dead in his hammock, and I was now the only living being in that dreary spot. I now discharged several rockets, and made other signals for help; but it was not until the middle of the following day that a boat could venture to the island.

In Derring's sea chest was discovered a written confession of his latest misdeed. It appeared by it that he had concealed from the authorities the fact that some months previously a steamer had been wrecked on the island, all on board perishing save only one female passenger. This was afterwards proved to have been no other than the *Dona Carmen*, and the solitary survivor of the many who had been on board, was Jessie Mainwaring. She was saved from the shipwreck, only to be kept in captivity by the wicked old pirate Derring, whose object was to retain possession of some valuable jewels which had belonged to Mrs. Mainwaring, and which had been found in a trunk that had been accidentally washed ashore. Poor Jessie had been confined in an underground apartment beneath the lighthouse, where, from grief, solitude, and the threats of the old pirate, who had menaced her life should his theft be detected, her reason had wholly succumbed. This, then, was the explanation of the mystery of the haunted island.

My poor Jessie's body drifted to the shore and was buried, as was also that of Old Derrick. The diamonds were, I believe, restored to the Mainwaring family, but I am told that I was myself nearly mad for months after the events of that fearful night. Be that as it may, I am sane now, an aged, broken man, living only in the memory of the past.

SAFELY MARRIED.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "AN EXPERIENCE," "DAISY'S TRIALS," &c., &c.

CHAPTER VII.

It was then the beginning of November, but such a day as might have been expressly made to hinder us from giving a bad name to any month in the year.

My old pony trotted along cheerily, my old man chatted cheerily, the robins in the hedges sang cheerily; but, somehow, I couldn't feel cheery.

"More than a month," I kept saying to myself; "more than a month, for it was then September, and to have heard and seen nothing of them since that afternoon!"

I had not even heard of them through my doctor, who, dear old man, came from the opposite direction to Braithwait, and was too old and too deaf to be much of a gossip purveyor. We learnt nothing at the lodge we drove through, for the gate was opened by a child, who stared at me, finger in mouth, too shy to speak. We saw no one in the park, and in the grounds no one—it was just the gardeners' dinner hour.

I have often felt a peculiar sadness in a sunny solitude, the loneliness of gloom seems less unnatural. That day the sight of the dear old house, sunny, silent, solitary, not a face at door or window, not a dog, even, on the steps or the gravel sweep—sunny, silent, solitary, against its background of pine-clad, pine-crowned hill—silent, except for the sleepy sound of rooks, and for the always, even in stillest weather, heard sea murmur in those pines, dimmed my eyes with tears.

To me Braithwait is a place of many memories and of unrivalled attractions.

Climbing to the crest of that pine-darkened hill behind it, and turning northward, you get a magnificent coast view. You stand, then, on the highest ground in Yorkshire, and, looking over miles of intervening moor, see headland stretching beyond headland, white-lipped bay beyond white-lipped bay. Ah! the wild delight of a climb to that wintry crest, to bathe with the sea-breeze there, on a mad March morning when I was young. And the mysterious, half fearful pleasure of the return through the deepening darkness of the ominous soundful pine wood at dusk.

The house of Braithwait, thus guarded on the north, faces due south, and catches east and west sunshine by projecting windows. Its plantations, shrubberies, and gardens, all gently sloping southwards, are as beautiful, and richly varied, and, I should say—but, then, I am a favourably prejudging witness—as productive as any in England. Braithwait seems always to have a climate of its own, to have been destined to be a home paradise, dropped down in the midst of this dark northern country.

In spite of the deserted aspect of the place, my approach had not, I found, been unobserved. By the time my pony had stopped at the foot of the flight of steps leading up to the portico, Allan Braithwait was descending them to meet me.

Although his smile for me was most charmingly affectionate, I was immediately, as it were, heart-struck by the expression of his face—an expression of settled misery—and by his look of seriously bad health.

I was stiff with long sitting in my old chaise, and he had almost to lift me to the ground—almost to carry me up the steps, which he did with a kindness that was quite filial. He spoke a good word to my old Nicholas, and promised him good entertainment; and, when I dropped into the first chair in the hall, telling him I had been ill, and was, for that reason, more short of breath than usual, he seemed genuinely concerned.

"What a selfish, unfeeling brute you must think me, Miss Hammond. So engrossed by my own happiness, you see, as to have no thought for anyone or anything else."

The last words he said with an intensity of bitterness and irony which made me shiver.

"I should be well content to find I had been on that account neglected; but I can't say that, if this has been the case, you look as if happiness had agreed with you; you look ill," I couldn't help commenting.

"I am ill. Ill, mind and body; but no matter for that. Where shall I take you? I recommend the library as the warmest and snuggest place; and I know you don't mind a suspicion of tobacco."

"No, no; but it's a new thing for you to smoke. Perhaps it's that which is not agreeing with you?"

"I am trying it as a sedative," he answered me.

"A sedative! What do you want with a sedative? Work is the only fit and proper sedative for people who are strong and young. But, where's your wife? Where's Elfie?"

Without answering my inquiries, he gave me his arm into the library, wheeled the chair he thought I should like best to the pleasantest corner, put a stool for my feet, a screen to protect me from the fire, fresh as I was from the frost-touched air; suggested that I should take off my shawl and loosen my bonnet; and then he begged to know what I would take—lunch, he supposed, would be ready by-and-by, but, after my long drive, I ought to take something at once. Wine, soup, tea, what?

While he, having rang, waited to give his order (service at Braithwait was not now as prompt as I remembered it in the old times), I looked round the room for any sign of Elfie: and, somehow, shrank faint-heartedly from repeating my in-

quiries for her. It was a large and delightful room—all dark oak and dim crimson, with great variety of convenient tables, attended upon by suitable chairs; and had always, by reason of the differing aspects of its projecting, mullioned window, sunshine in some part, if any sunshine were to be had anywhere; but of Elfie I found no trace. There was no work-basket—by fits and starts Elfie would devote herself to fancy work—no thrown down garden hat and gloves; Elfie liked picking flowers, and the garden was still gay with them. No open magazine or novel; no litter of music, though I knew the piano in this room was a good one, and especially brought here for Elfie. No pencils, paints, or drawing-board; in fact, no sign at all of Elfie.

"Is your wife ill?" I asked, when the servant had been and had gone.

"Not that I know of. She danced till about five this morning at a ball to which I had forbidden her to go. Possibly, therefore, she's tired. She may be still in bed."

His tone was hard and hopeless, and seemed meant to be one of studied indifference.

"I'll go and look for her when I've had my cup of tea," I said, trying to speak lightly. "It will do her no good to sleep away this lovely morning, however little night sleep she may have had. She should be up and out."

He only shrugged his shoulders, evidently intending to indicate that this was not a matter in which he had any influence, or a subject which had any interest for him. Then he tried to make me garrulous on what is supposed to be one of an old woman's favourite topics—her own ailments. I ought to have had better advice than poor old Dr. Skirlew's, he said; and he wished to make me promise on any future occasion, should such arise, to let him know of my being ill.

"At least—if—"

He broke that sentence off abruptly. The servant, just then entering with my tea, gave him the excuse for doing this; but I seemed to understand that he would have done the same in any case.

He had the tea equipage set down, that he might with his own hand serve me. He made himself indescribably gracious, with a sort of tender lovingness in his attentions. It seemed as if, apart from his care for the individual, he had, poor fellow, a pleasure in having somebody to care for. It was only when I spoke of Elfie, when I tried to bring the talk

round to their own affairs, that all this changed, and he grew moody, reserved, one might almost say sullen. By-and-by, after restlessly pacing the room for some time, breaking silence at intervals, and in answer to my questions or remarks, but evidently with the effort caused by pre-occupation; by-and-by he opened each of the different doors, to look down the passages outside them (one of these doors which might, without the knowledge of those in the room, have admitted a listener, he locked as he reclosed it); then he came and seated himself in a low chair, very close to me, from which he could address himself to my better-hearing ear, and began to speak. Speaking, at first, with no heat or passion, but as a man in an evil dream might speak out some of the evil things of his dream—things that, for him, were so familiar as to have lost all suspicion of extravagance and to have passed beyond any region in which doubt and question were any longer possible.

"You will hardly be surprised to hear," was his curiously formal manner of commencement—and the notion occurred to me that he might be about to speak much what he had made up his mind to write, had he not seen me—"that, having been now more than one year married, I believe myself to have no love for my wife left; no love and no tenderness, still more emphatically, no respect. She is cold, and cruel, and false. She has let herself become little more than a puppet in the hands of a man who finds his best pleasure and pastime in crossing, and thwarting, and harassing, and wounding her husband through her. This is not a state of things to be put up with. I am seeking about for a cure. I thought it would be easy to find a cure. I thought I had found one. But it is not easy, and I have not yet found one. Not easy, for this reason, that I am not yet indifferent to everything—that there is one thing which still remains inexpressibly dear to me."

Here he paused, as if to give me opportunity for exclamation or for question. He had spoken with his eyes upon the ground, and he did not now lift them.

Somewhat occupied by wondering if he were quite sane (not so much, alas! because of the matter of what he said, as because of the strangeness of his look and manner), and conscious of a queer, creepy coldness coming over me, I did not speak; and finding I did not, he went on—

"The one thing which still remains

inexpressibly dear to me is, as you will have already guessed, the honour of the good old name. How am I to protect this? How am I to save this? Can you tell me, Miss Hammond?"

It was here that his manner began to lose something of its unnatural formality. As he continued, it gradually became more and more agitated.

"From any appeal to my wife I have nothing to hope. There is nothing in her to which to appeal, neither heart nor conscience, neither loyalty nor love. From any attempt to rule or coerce her I have nothing to hope. I can get no grasp of her, she slips through my hands, eludes my hold. If there is any stable good thing in her, any pure womanliness, I have failed to find the clue to it. How to save the honour of the dear old name! This is now the problem of my nights and of my days, of my sleepless nights of and my days in which there is neither profit nor pleasure. How to save the honour of the dear old name! I cannot see my way. My death would not do it, nor hers, nor his. The world would talk. Can you give me any hope or any help, Miss Hammond?"

His tone, as he ended, seemed to go deep down into my heart; but for all answer to his appeal, I cried, seizing him by the arm, and roughly shaking it,

"Good heavens, Allan Braithwait, wake up, man, wake up! You're dreaming, man, wake up, wake up!"

Then, at last, for the first time since he had begun to speak, he lifted his look to mine. His eyes were full of wonder, for a moment he stared at me without a word, then taking my hand from his arm to hold it in his hand (the dry heat of which told its tale of feverish disorder, the cause or the consequence of his sleepless nights and his days in which he found neither profit nor pleasure?) he said, with an indulgent gentleness, which, from one in such trouble of mind, seemed to me inexpressibly touching,

"I had forgotten how sudden, how strange, and how extravagant all this might seem to you. The time, perhaps, is not, in weeks and months, long, during which these thoughts have been so fatally familiar to me, and yet it seems no longer time but eternity—as if they had been always thus with me. And, indeed, from the very beginning, even before we returned to England from our wedding-journey, such thoughts had visited me, though then I was still able to thrust them aside and to trample on them."

"Then, indeed," I said, not allowing myself to be softened, but trying to speak sternly, "I fear I have cause to think that I have married my lovely childish Elfie to a madman!"

Without the slightest apparent heed to my ejaculation he went on,

"I can see no way out of it—none. No light anywhere. In whatever direction I look nothing but blackness. I could bear to do without happiness. That trial I could, or so I believe, bear uncomplainingly. But it is not possible, and it ought not to be possible, to live without honour. So I say, but how am I help it? For though, in sober truth, I would rather be guilty of murder, hers, or his, or both, than let myself be dishonoured, how could such murder help me in saving the honour of the dear old name? It would not help me. One hears what the world would say. One knows what the world would think. One sees the mud that would be thrown. What is to help me? Surely there must be some way of help, though I have failed to find it, have utterly failed to find it." Here he dropped my hand, which he had held in his till now, and got up; going to the table at which he had probably been sitting before I came, he took up something over which till now had lain a newspaper.

"Not even this," he said, standing before me now, and looking down with a sort of grim lovingness on the deadly little weapon with which he seemed to me to play as if it had been a harmless toy. "Not even this, it seems to me, can save, what it is saying nothing to say that I would gladly give my life to save. My life—what is that worth to me?" he ended meditatively.

I must own to having been dreadfully frightened—frightened for myself, as well as shocked and frightened for him and for Elfie. I always have had a horror of firearms, a sort of feeling that they may at any time and of their own accord "go off" even by merely being looked at. I certainly was dreadfully frightened.

But I hope I did not show my fright, he did not seem to see it, when suddenly he glanced up into my face—a sort of longing and of appeal over his own.

"If you would show me any way of keeping honour safe, of keeping the honour of the dear old name unstained—if any voice, from heaven, or earth, or hell, would teach me to do that—then, all the rest might go. Oh, I could live, if only on this one point I could have peace and

safety, I could live. I would try to live usefully, would try to do my duty to God and to man, indeed I would Miss Hammond." This spoken with a boyish earnestness that softened my eyes to tears and even brought them dropping down.

In spite, however, of those tears, I tried to take a rallying tone.

"Who would believe in your sanity, Allan Braithwait, when told that all this rant and rhapsody, this most foolish and most wicked talk of suicide and murder has for cause—what? That your wife last night went to a ball to which you had not wished her to go!" I finished with a mixture of mockery and grandmotherly reproof.

He looked at me very strangely before he spoke again. Then he said in a much less overstrained tone, but with sternness of emphasis—a dominating manliness to which I could not dare play the rallying grandmother. "A ball, remember, to which I had strictly forbidden her to go. A ball given by the only people in the county whom I have forbidden her to visit. A ball to which I had her 'promise' that she would not go! A ball to which (returning home after a few hours of needless absence earlier than I was expected), I find her gone with Edgar Ramsay and that sister of his, Mrs. Hurston, a woman whose reputation is already, or very soon will be, as a burst bubble, and with whom I had just charged my wife to have nothing to do!"

"That was bad, very bad, very very bad, I own. But, if you had heard them, there were doubtless some excuses, some extenuating circumstances. The disobedience, depend upon it, was not, on Elfie's part, premeditated. I never—or, if ever, I hardly ever—knew Elfie guilty of deliberately premeditated falsehood and deceit. They over-persuaded her—you cannot tell what arguments, what taunts they used—they over-persuaded her. You never could have dreamed that you had married a woman of strong character; you have not been in that way deceived. If you had heard her defence, you would have doubtless found there had been less wickedness than weakness in her conduct." So I pleaded despairingly.

"But I find I have married a woman of strong character! She is strong in evil, strong in defying me. Strong in taking her own way and holding her own path. Strong in the subtleties of her obstinacy."

There was a silence of some length after those words of his, to which I did not know how to answer. Then I said, speak-

ing from a sudden, and, as I afterwards found, a true inspiration—

“I fancy I can tell you what argument prevailed with Elfie, or rather to what passion her tempters appealed—to her jealousy. They persuaded her you would be at that ball yourself, to meet some one with whom you did not care that she should see you, and that for such reason you had forbidden her to go.”

“Pshaw!” he said roughly. “She cares too little for me to be jealous of me. Besides,” was added in a less convinced tone, “the only woman of whom she can ever have had the slightest shade of cause even to dream of being jealous was the last woman in the world likely to be there.”

“That she would not know. In some ways she is very ignorant, I would even say innocent. She might be easily duped by such people as Mr. Ramsay and his sister.”

To this he did not answer. As much to break a silence which made me nervous as for any good could come of such a question, I asked,

“Is there no way in which you can rid the neighbourhood of your cousin?”

“Do you think I have not tried all ways—all ways but one.” He was again fingering that horrid pistol. “And it is no pity for him, but only care for the one thing left me to care for, the good old name, that has stood between him and that one way. If I shot him what reason would the world find for my deed?”

“If the world found the true reason it would say that you were mad.”

“But the world does not find true reasons. Not that that reason would be true! I have endured enough to madden a strong brain, but I am not mad. Last night, Miss Hammond,” here he seated himself beside me again, and spoke so low that I had to strain my hearing to the utmost to hear him, “when I came home and learnt where Elfie was gone, and in what company, I made no doubt but that the end had come, the worst had happened. For that I own myself a fool! Edgar will make no sacrifices such as are incurred by a man who takes a woman from her home and her husband. He will study to make his revenge as costless to himself as costly to me.”

“Have you seen your wife since she came back? Or has she been judged and condemned unheard?”

“The circumstances, not I, judge and condemn her. They admit of no explanation.”

“Have you seen her?” I repeated, angrily.

“This was in my hand when she came back. I did not trust myself to see her.” He spoke with dreary gentleness.

Trying to keep up my show of anger, though that gentle dreariness in the strong young man greatly touched me, “Let me tell you,” I said, “the sooner that” (with a sideway nod of my black bonnet towards the obnoxious thing he held), “is out of your hand the better. You are no more fit to be trusted with it than a child. This shooting mania you have upon you makes you positively unsafe. Put the silly, dangerous toy away. You will be shooting me presently, if I should say anything in any way to offend you, and I mean to speak pretty plainly!”

Of course he saw through my poor attempt at bravado, my poor pretence of carrying things off lightly, half by affecting anger, half by trying to make his desperation ridiculous. Without giving him time to speak, I went on to rail at him in good set terms of old-womanly railing; almost accusing him, before I came to a pause, of loving some woman who was not his wife, who poisoned his mind against his wife, so that he could speak of my lovely Elfie as if she were some hardened sinner—some woman of the world, long practised in the world’s wickedness, rather than the child she was.

Poor fellow! He seemed much “taken aback” by such an assault from me. He coloured high with anger or annoyance. He laughed a bitter, embarrassed laugh. I fancied that, spite of that embarrassment, and spite of that incredulity, my abuse of him was found comforting.

Finally, as if feeling he must do something, he got up, walked to one of the windows, and opened it; then, infinitely to my relief, fired off his pistol.

“I never heard of insanity in the Braithwaite family till now,” I concluded, when he was again close enough to hear me. “But I prefer to think you mad to thinking you a very worthless and wicked young man.”

In what fashion he might have answered me I never knew. At this instant a door flew open, and the apparition it admitted arrested us.